



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on New Religion Law in Kazakhstan

As delivered by Kaye Lee, Director, Office of Resources Management
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 13, 2011

Despite assurances from the Government of Kazakhstan that the new law on religion would be in keeping with its OSCE commitments and its international obligations and commitments regarding freedom of religion, the United States wishes to express its serious concern that the new law appears to fall short of those measures.

The new law, passed by the Kazakhstani Parliament on September 29, requires that existing religious organizations submit re-registration documents within one year via a procedure that subjects them to an examination of their religious literature. The United States is concerned that this process could be used to restrict the activities of religious groups thereby negatively impacting religious freedom in Kazakhstan.

The new tiered registration system appears to prohibit the registration of religious groups with fewer than 50 members in each location. Other provisions appear to allow strict oversight of missionary activity, government reviews of religious literature and texts, and restrictions on the location of places of worship.

When governments unduly restrict religious freedom and freedom of expression, or when societies fail to take steps to promote tolerance and curb discrimination based on religious identity, they risk alienating religious believers and emboldening extremists.

We urge the government of Kazakhstan to work with ODIHR to address these concerns in order to ensure that this law does not improperly restrict freedom of religion or belief in any way that is inconsistent with the country's OSCE commitments and its international obligations and commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.